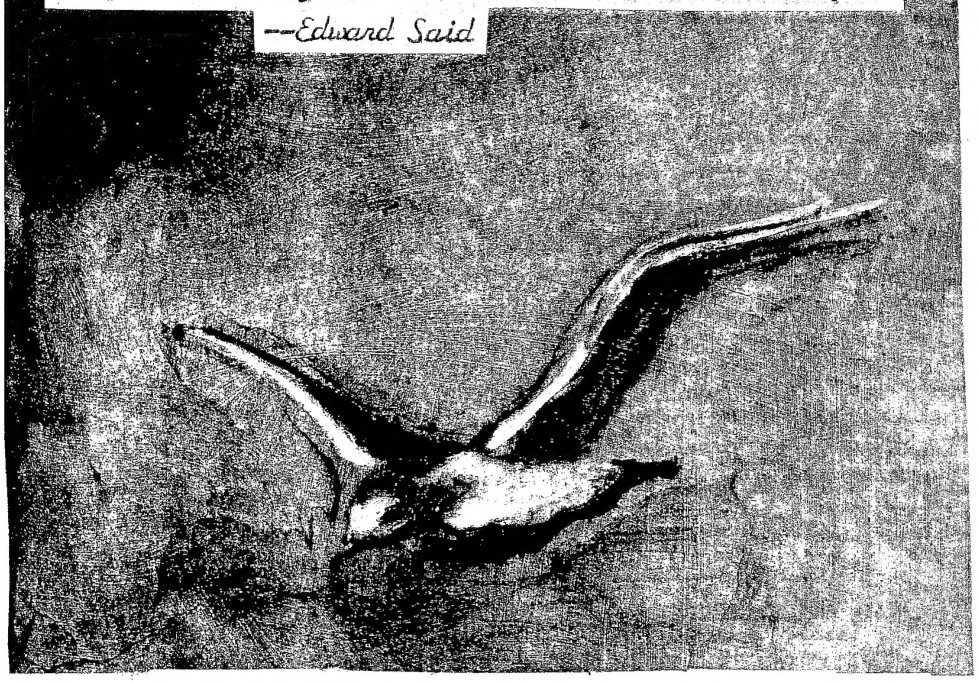
"It is inadequate only to affirm that a people was dispossessed, oppressed, or slaughtered, denied its rights and its political existence, without at the same time...affiliating those horrors with the similar afflictions of other people. This does not at all mean a loss in historical specificity, but rather it guards against the possibility that a lesson learned about oppression in one place will be forgotten or violated in another place or time. And just because you represent the suffering that your people lived through which you yourself might have lived through also, you are not relieved of the duty of revealing that your own people now may be visiting related crimes on their victims."

--Edward Said



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Summer 2012

doykeit

DOYKEIT

The concept of "doykeit," Yiddish for "hereness," is taken from the pre-World War II Polish-Jewish group The Bund, which believed that Jews have both a right to live and a political commitment to work for change "here and now."

"As a Jew, I was taught that it was ethically imperative to speak up and to speak out against arbitrary state violence. That was part of what I learned when I learned about the Second World War and the concentration camps. There were those who would and could speak out against state racism and state violence, and it was imperative that we be able to speak out. Not just for Jews, but for any number of people. There was an entire idea of social justice that emerged for me from the consideration of the Nazi genocide. I would also say that what became really hard for me is that if one wanted to criticize Israeli state violence - precisely because that as a Jew one is under obligation to criticize excessive state violence and state racism - then one is in a bind, because one is told that one is either self-hating as a Jew or engaging anti-Semitism. And yet for me, it comes out of a certain Jewish value of social justice. So how can I fulfill my obligation as a Jew to speak out against an injustice when, in speaking out against Israeli state and military injustice, I am accused of not being a good enough Jew or of being a self-hating Jew?" --Judith Butler

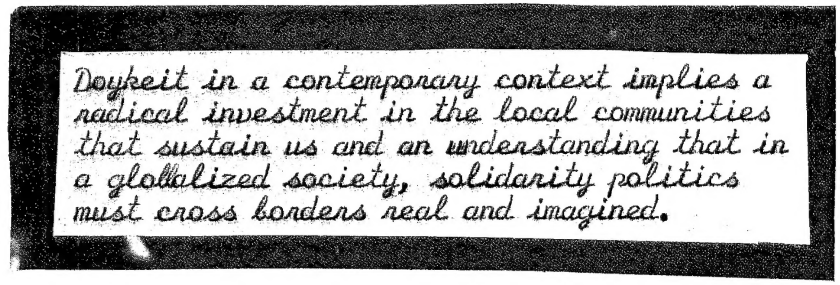
middle of the 2005 conflict over the Disengagement Plan and in the middle of my own conflict over my lingering Zionism, my own longings for something that I thought was a homeland. The crowds in Jerusalem were scattered with blue and orange ribbons. There were a couple of stabbings while we were there, of gay activists during Pride on Ben Yehuda Street. I had this idea, the same idea that keeps me going back to the conservative synagogue in Reisterstown that my parents attend, of praying with my father at this supposedly holy place, one day. It should have been obvious to me before we even arrived, that there would be that high fence, blocking off a little corner for the women to pray, separate from the men. I don't know why I didn't expect it, why I stood numb holding my stupid little prayer slip to stick in some stupid crumbling rock while our guide warned Lily, the only person on our trip who actually knew how to put on tefillin, not to, because it would offend and anger the "religious" Jews at the Wall. And then I stood there touching the stone, like I would feel something, feeling stupid the whole time. And as our tour bus drove away, I sat in the air conditioning and stared at another wall, snaking through the hills in the near distance, with Palestinian workers on the other side waiting to go through military checkpoints to get to their jobs and families.

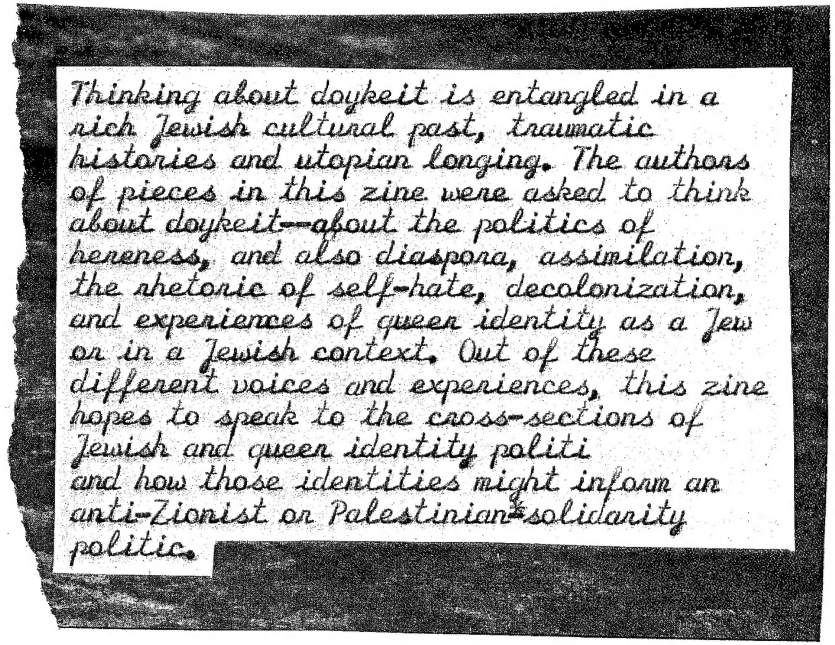
Remembering these things, writing these things down, disjointed and inexplicable, devoid of the theory that normally orients me and places me at a comfortable arms length, feels increasingly urgent. Time is moving so quickly that it seems hard to grasp, to pin down. Time flickers like a black and white home movie of my Oma and Opa with my teenage grandfather and great aunt, visiting the ruins of Europe after the war.

I fill the blanks of my great-grandparent's story with fictions, with film noir scenes. My Opa is big and brutish, heavy-browed with a fierce underbite, in his tuxedo and boxing gloves, flinging off Nazis like rag dolls. My Oma is tiny and pale, ninety pounds soaking wet but looking sophisticated in a pencil skirt and heels, seductively bribing bureaucrats with a toddler on each hip. The details seem important now, now that my Oma has been dead for almost two years. She told these stories with a sort of deus ex machina touch, the stuff of myth, over and over again with odd details intact, always what someone was wearing or how beautiful was the French Resistance girl, to whom my Oma gave her pearls, never logistics. I told this story to my roommate recently and she asked, incredulous, "but how?" I don't know. It seems like the kind of thing that might be useful to know, but I don't.

All the storytellers in my family are dead, and these are the only stories that made it through the fire, my maternal great-grandparents, who lived secular, aristocratic, blonde-hair-blue-eyed lives until the mid-30s. Not so much my father's family, who fled from somewhere around modern Lithuania chased by (fellow) peasants with pitchforks and torches, like Frankenstein's monster. My great-grandparents, again with an infant in tow, end up in my mind looking something like Tevye and Golde, coming out of a shtetl that looks like a children's book illustration of Chelm. I remember sitting with my Bubbie in shul, eating jelly candies while my Zaide and my father davened in the men's section. I remember playing with the rabbi's dozen kids and my Zaide reading the Torah in a Kiss mask on Simchas Torah. My Zaide has been dead for a decade and I wait greedily for my Bubbie to tell us snatches of information through the haze of hearing loss, with her thick Baltimore accent; "Your father was born on Purim, I remember they brought me a hamantashen. They told me I had a boy and I said, 'Oh I know!'"

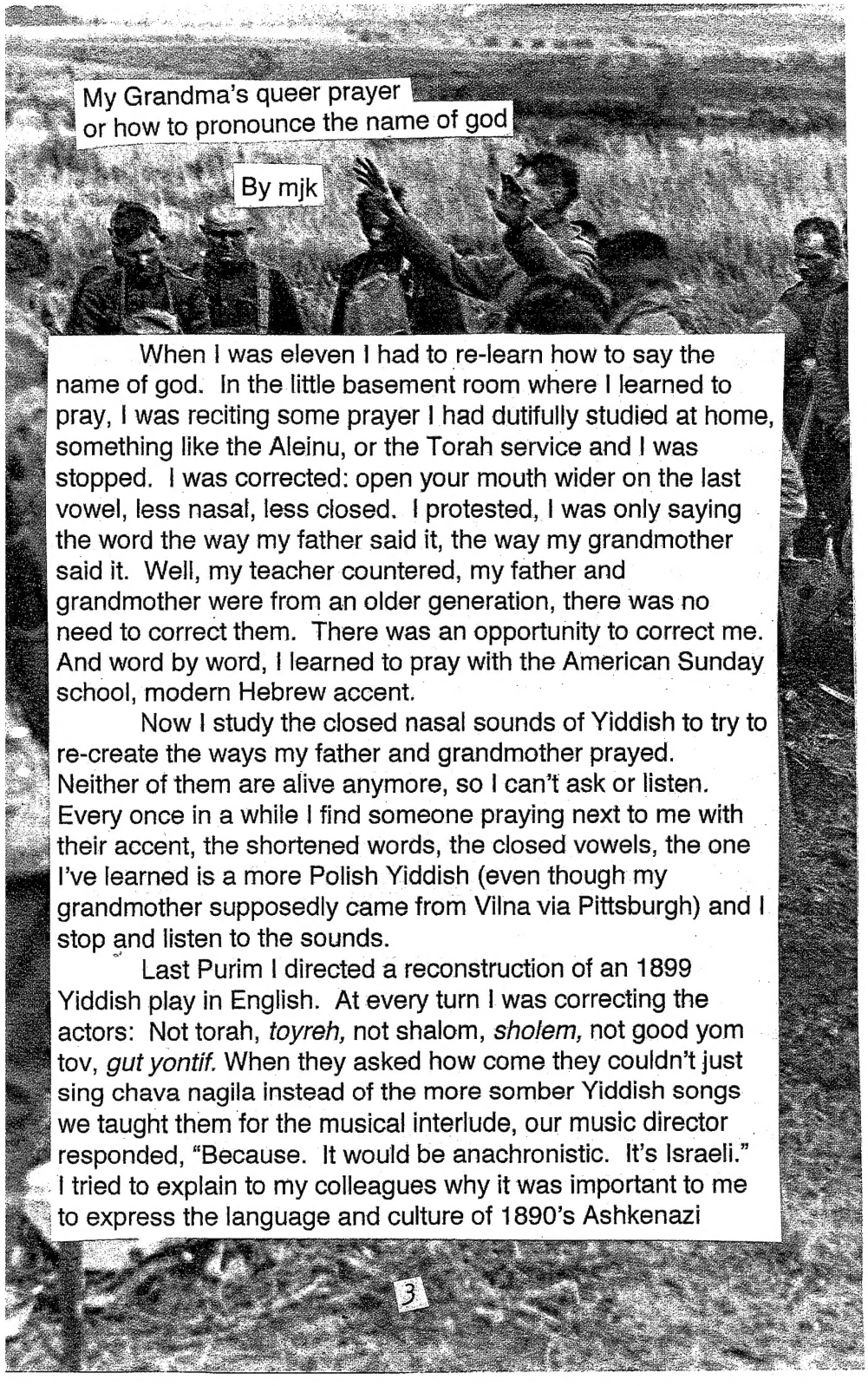
I keep returning to this fact: I will never daven with my father at the Western Wall. I went to Israel once, with Birthright, in the


Doykeit in a contemporary context implies a radical investment in the local communities that sustain us and an understanding that in a globalized society, solidarity politics must cross borders real and imagined.


Thinking about doykeit is entangled in a rich Jewish cultural past, traumatic histories and utopian longing. The authors of pieces in this zine were asked to think about doykeit—about the politics of hereness, and also diaspora, assimilation, the rhetoric of self-hate, decolonization, and experiences of queer identity as a Jew or in a Jewish context. Out of these different voices and experiences, this zine hopes to speak to the cross-sections of Jewish and queer identity politi and how those identities might inform an anti-Zionist or Palestinian solidarity politic.

"Social ideas are not something only to dream about for the future. If they are to mean anything at all they must be translated into our daily life, here and now; they must shape our relations with our fellow-man. It was this kind of human relationship that placed its seal on all the strivings and aspirations of the libertarian movement of the Jewish workers in Britain, and made it such a fine and blessed thing."

– Rudolph Rocker, The London Years



My Grandma's queer prayer or how to pronounce the name of god

By mjk

When I was eleven I had to re-learn how to say the name of god. In the little basement room where I learned to pray, I was reciting some prayer I had dutifully studied at home, something like the Aleinu, or the Torah service and I was stopped. I was corrected: open your mouth wider on the last vowel, less nasal, less closed. I protested, I was only saying the word the way my father said it, the way my grandmother said it. Well, my teacher countered, my father and grandmother were from an older generation, there was no need to correct them. There was an opportunity to correct me. And word by word, I learned to pray with the American Sunday school, modern Hebrew accent.

Now I study the closed nasal sounds of Yiddish to try to re-create the ways my father and grandmother prayed. Neither of them are alive anymore, so I can't ask or listen. Every once in a while I find someone praying next to me with their accent, the shortened words, the closed vowels, the one I've learned is a more Polish Yiddish (even though my grandmother supposedly came from Vilna via Pittsburgh) and I stop and listen to the sounds.

Last Purim I directed a reconstruction of an 1899 Yiddish play in English. At every turn I was correcting the actors: Not torah, *toyreh,* not shalom, *sholem,* not good yom tov, *gut yontif.* When they asked how come they couldn't just sing chava nagila instead of the more somber Yiddish songs we taught them for the musical interlude, our music director responded, "Because. It would be anachronistic. It's Israeli." I tried to explain to my colleagues why it was important to me to express the language and culture of 1890's Ashkenazi

Ghosts

By JB

Time seems slippery, like Dana Franklin's arm inexplicably embedded in the plaster wall in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Micah Bazant sitting with his father at a cafe in Berlin, both young men, before the war, in the zine *Timtum*. When I was a kid I used to love this genre of books, surprisingly vast, where bored modern Jewish teenagers snapped their gum and didn't get why they had to sit through the whole seder, and then opened the door for Elijah only to find themselves in the Warsaw ghetto.

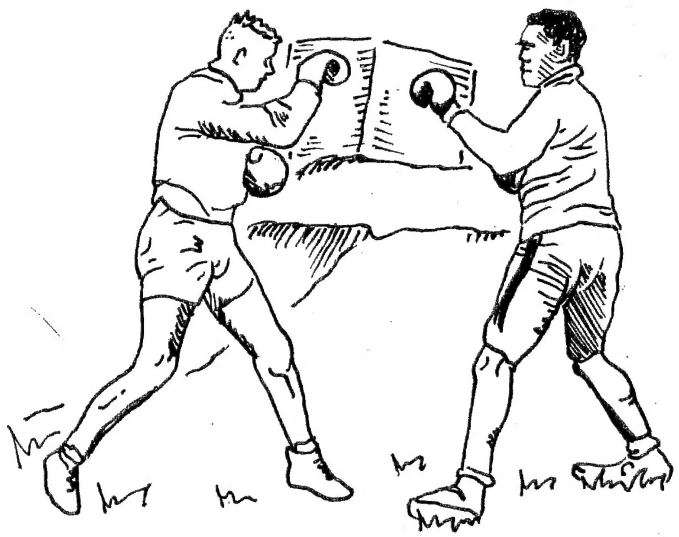
Time like a thin curtain that you can slip through, back and forth. Traumas so thick they are tangible, the stern warning to never forget, that it could happen again, just like that. I knew about genocide before many of my classmates could conceive of death. I worked diligently to learn the Mourners Kaddish, to learn about Abraham and Isaac like every Jewish thing I knew was a big "fuck you" to Hitler. I wanted to be a rabbi, for a while.

I keep returning to this fact: My great grandfather once beat the living daylights out of Joseph Goebbels, the sick sallow-faced Nazi scumbag. It seems like a touchstone to me now, a sort of evidence that resistance is in my blood, that my clenched fists are as genetic as my heavyweight frame. It's a point of pride, that my bulldog playboy of an Opa had to get out of Germany in 1935 because his hobby was beating up Nazis. Ineffective maybe, but the ghosts of Aryan jaws cracking under my Opa's knuckles buzzes in my joints. He grins in black and white.

All the storytellers in my family are dead. I don't know exactly how my Oma managed to break "her men" out of the French prison camp in St. Cyprien, disguised as a Red Cross nurse. My grandfather wasn't old enough to remember walking across the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain, his teddy bear gutted and filled with gold. His sister was even younger, and now dead.

At school you've started changing in the bathrooms instead of the locker rooms because of some unfortunate rumors about your alleged "staring" making the rest of the girls in third period volleyball uncomfortable. But you know better, it's just one girl, who caught you looking just once, then told the team. There's no going back to just being a klutz. Now you're a klutz and a creep, and middle school has never seemed longer. Summer is coming and you dream that maybe your parents will have enough money to send you to Camp Alonim for an entire session, instead of just one weekend a month.

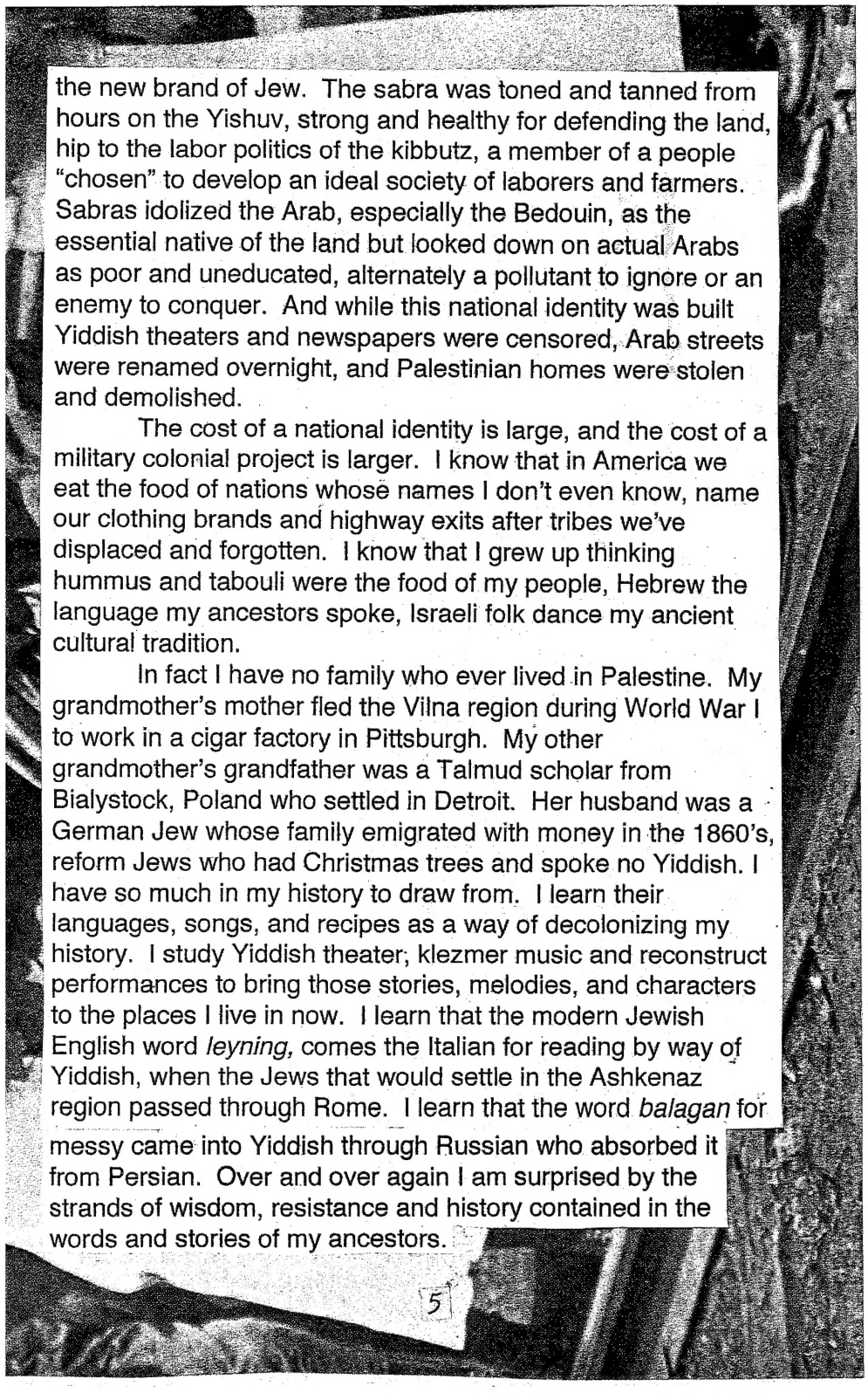
Maybe Alana will go too and you'll be able to share her cabin for eight weeks straight. Your skin will clear up, you'll get a new white dress for the Sabbath, you'll figure out how to tame your frizzy hair without confining it to a sloppy ponytail. Zack and Jacob and David will break their ankles skateboarding. They will not try to dance with you again. Alana will lose her interest in hiking with boys and when she is lonely, there will just be you. And maybe, if you are brave and ask nicely, she will finally let you braid her hair.



immigrants, free from the influence of modern Israeli culture, but I struggled. Many of them had a hard time understanding the difference. What was the "more pure" or more authentic essence I wanted to arrive at and why was it so important? I was at a loss.

That semester I was also playing fiddle in a klezmer band. I was studying Chasidic stories in early 1700's Yiddish late on Wednesday nights. I was going to lectures at the YIVO, reading books on the Yiddish Theater, going to New York on the weekends to interview experts. I was auditing a class on modern Jewish languages and nationalisms. Near the end of the class we arrived at writings by early Zionists who wrote about the ghastly sound of Yiddish and the struggle to stamp it out in Israel (it was their first language). They wrote about the necessity of creating culture for the Jewish people who would finally have a nation-state, the necessity of "creating a culture for a people who had none."

And then came Israeli culture. Israeli music, food and folk dance, borrowed from the European cultures that had oppressed Jews for years, stolen from the Arab neighbors who Israel hoped to colonize, mixed up and passed it off as the glorious and dynamic "melting pot" of the new Jewish nation state. Early Israeli novelists and journalists had the joy of making up new words in a fledgling language. A small elite and academic movement around Hebrew language found itself at the helm of creating a new national identity. The military and education system were employed as twin forces for instituting a unified people with a common culture. Early Zionist founders authored the "sabra" myth : the image of immigrants who would shed their hated past and put on the new tough and exotic garb of the sabra or ideal Israeli citizen,



the new brand of Jew. The sabra was toned and tanned from hours on the Yishuv, strong and healthy for defending the land, hip to the labor politics of the kibbutz, a member of a people "chosen" to develop an ideal society of laborers and farmers. Sabras idolized the Arab, especially the Bedouin, as the essential native of the land but looked down on actual Arabs as poor and uneducated, alternately a pollutant to ignore or an enemy to conquer. And while this national identity was built Yiddish theaters and newspapers were censored, Arab streets were renamed overnight, and Palestinian homes were stolen and demolished.

The cost of a national identity is large, and the cost of a military colonial project is larger. I know that in America we eat the food of nations whose names I don't even know, name our clothing brands and highway exits after tribes we've displaced and forgotten. I know that I grew up thinking hummus and tabouli were the food of my people, Hebrew the language my ancestors spoke, Israeli folk dance my ancient cultural tradition.

In fact I have no family who ever lived in Palestine. My grandmother's mother fled the Vilna region during World War I to work in a cigar factory in Pittsburgh. My other grandmother's grandfather was a Talmud scholar from Bialystock, Poland who settled in Detroit. Her husband was a German Jew whose family emigrated with money in the 1860's, reform Jews who had Christmas trees and spoke no Yiddish. I have so much in my history to draw from. I learn their languages, songs, and recipes as a way of decolonizing my history. I study Yiddish theater; klezmer music and reconstruct performances to bring those stories, melodies, and characters to the places I live in now. I learn that the modern Jewish English word *leyning,* comes the Italian for reading by way of Yiddish, when the Jews that would settle in the Ashkenaz region passed through Rome. I learn that the word *balagan* for messy came into Yiddish through Russian who absorbed it from Persian. Over and over again I am surprised by the strands of wisdom, resistance and history contained in the words and stories of my ancestors.

5

and her clear braces, the silver wire that runs between each tooth, her earrings, hand-beaded with little blue seed beads and twisted up with stray hairs. Her eyelashes are kind of clumpy, coated in a little too much mascara, waving up and down from cheek to eyebrow, like languid palm fronds.

You tune back in long enough to hear her ask, "Right?" You nod, because "what?" is always the wrong answer. She starts talking again and there's a distinct absence of David's name so you stop watching her mouth move and ask about him. She says "it's no big deal; we're like, friend with benefits, you know?" You nod because "what?" is probably still the wrong answer, and "benefits?" is definitely the wrong answer.

In the next six months you and all of your friends will have bar and bat mitzvahs. Everyone will break out furiously the night before they sing their torah portions, haltingly, off-key, for an audience whose sole concern is the buffet style meal afterwards in the temple rec room. It's the same crowd of kids every time, just in different temples, with different old people, and new and horrible party games afterwards. At Alana's reception you will attempt what the boys call "grinding" for the first time, something you've seen at the Sierra Vista Middle School dances but haven't had any chance to try until now, and you will find some unwelcome hardness on your butt as Jacob rotates his hips and pushes against you.

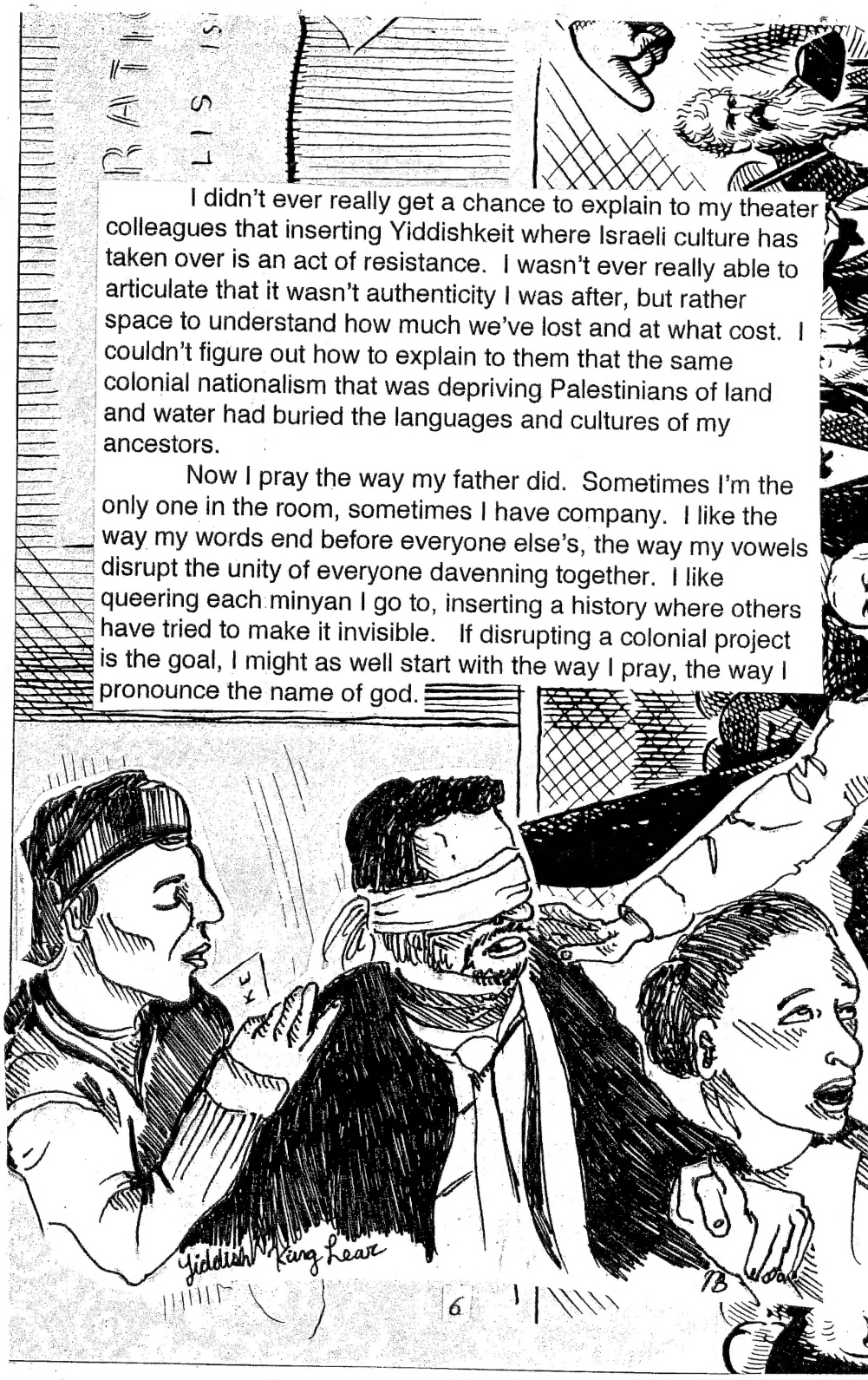
You will look across the dance floor and see Alana and Zack Horowitz ("Fuck David," she'll say a month after that fateful Shabbaton. "What a douchebag") mirroring your dancing except Alana's eyes are closed and she doesn't seem to mind the sweat on Zack's upper lip or the hands he's cautiously wrapped around her hip bones.

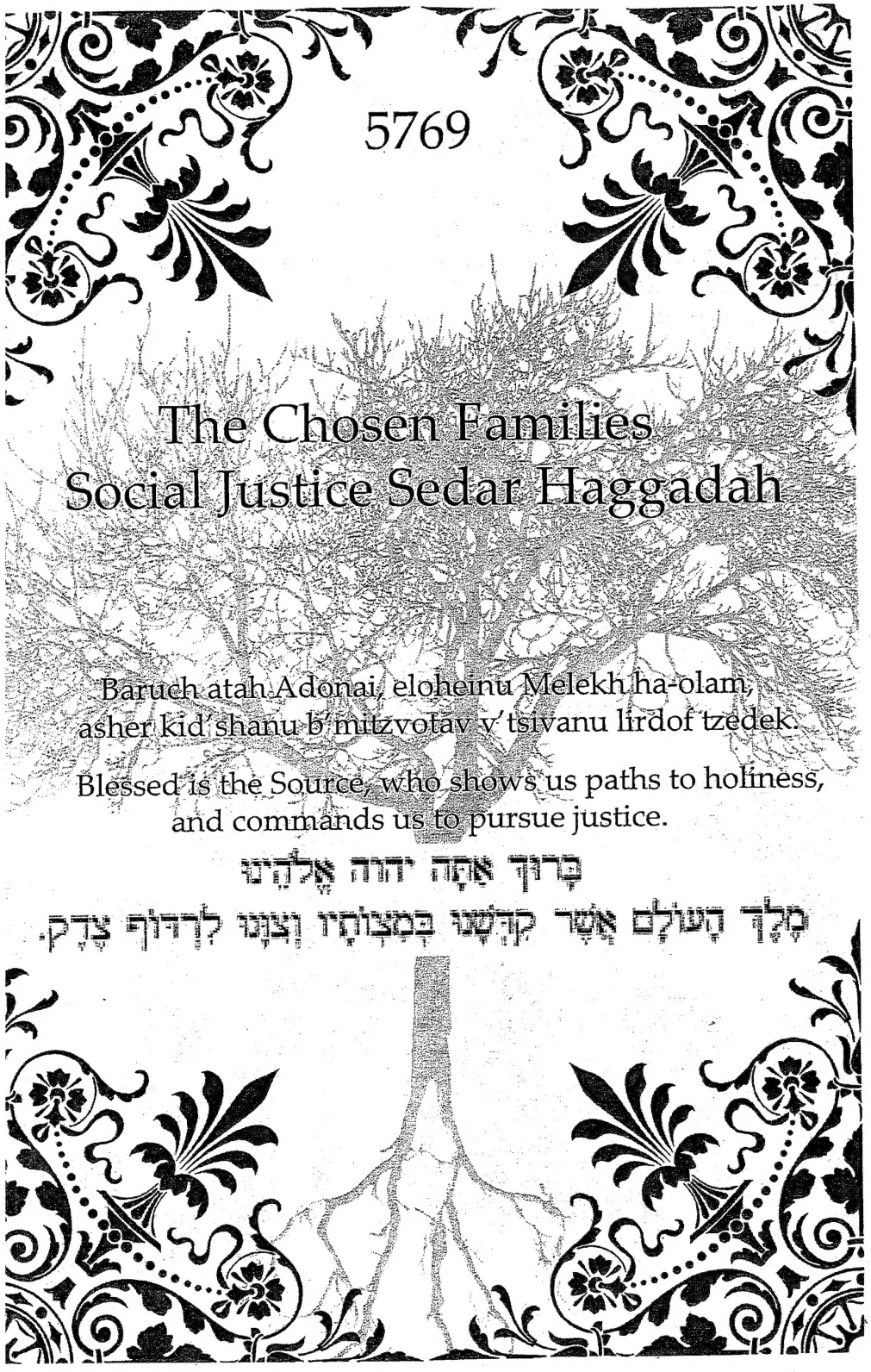
how could you deny it? Clutching your belly, you run back there, unruly ponytail swishing across your back as you go. The door shuts behind you, barely, and there goes the egg salad you had for lunch, the hash browns and scrambled eggs for breakfast, and you wonder if there's chicken in there from dinner, and maybe a roast beef sandwich from the lunch before that, and waffles from the breakfast before that, and maybe all the food you've ever eaten is making some kind of Egyptian exodus, years of heavy food and oppression evacuating through the split sea of your lips.

Then, after some fitful gagging, it's done. And you're so happy to have it all gone that the sweat on your forehead is of no consequence because it's *all gone* and you don't have to do this anymore, at least not today.

When you leave the bathroom the bus is still wavering, but there's nothing left to puke so you manage to talk your stomach out of jumping. To your left are those four seats, one of which used to be occupied by your ass last Shabbaton weekend, but now because of your stomach, belongs to an asthmatic girl named Hannah. Hannah looks a little queasy and maybe overheard your digestive exodus and it's really not helping her hold down lunch. She hops up and squeezes past everyone to take your place in the itty bitty stall, leaving one open seat.

Sarah Friedman and Leah Grossman laugh and Alana gestures to the freshly empty seat. You look out the front window, see the freeway speeding towards you and decide that you can handle it, for a few minutes. The cushion is still warm and Alana starts talking, but the only thing you can hear is this bizarre zoomed-in slow-mo woosh of her hair, making and breaking contact with the static cling of the metal headrest. The only thing you can see is her laughing mouth


I didn't ever really get a chance to explain to my theater colleagues that inserting Yiddishkeit where Israeli culture has taken over is an act of resistance. I wasn't ever really able to articulate that it wasn't authenticity I was after, but rather space to understand how much we've lost and at what cost. I couldn't figure out how to explain to them that the same colonial nationalism that was depriving Palestinians of land and water had buried the languages and cultures of my ancestors.
Now I pray the way my father did. Sometimes I'm the only one in the room, sometimes I have company. I like the way my words end before everyone else's, the way my vowels disrupt the unity of everyone davenning together. I like queering each minyan I go to, inserting a history where others have tried to make it invisible. If disrupting a colonial project is the goal, I might as well start with the way I pray, the way I pronounce the name of god.
Yiddish King Lear
6


5769
The Chosen Families
Social Justice Sedar Haggadah
Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu Melekh ha-olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu lirdof tzedek.
Blessed is the Source, who shows us paths to holiness,
and commands us to pursue justice.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְרִדּוּף צֶדֶק.

every chair leans back the same way (creakily.) Sure, there are four seats together in back, sure you're further from the chaperones, but you're right next to that tiny bathroom and if somebody poops, well then what?

In your front row seat, you're high up enough to see the scalps of everyone in line. One belongs to Alana and it's pressed up against one that is presumably David's. His mother, Mrs. Rachlis, who you met once on parents' weekend, has dyed brown hair that is held in place with enough hairspray to make a couch crunchy. She picks up David at Temple Beth Shalom so he has to ride bus #3. But you and Alana get picked up at the JCC so Alana waves at David and he disappears behind a bus, blowing kisses, the moron. Alana climbs up the steps and you put your backpack on the seat next to you. She eyes the bag briefly as she passes, but keeps walking, wiping at her pink puffy eyes and sniffling as she heads towards the back row, her curls bouncing slightly with each step.

A few kids in the front sing Etz Chaim He with some prompting from the counselors, but the girls in back are more concerned with gossiping about Zack Horowitz who is throwing a tennis ball back and forth with the boy across the row from him. The bus rolls along, Etz Chaim He transitions to Im Tirtzu, Im Tirtzu, Ein Zo Agada, Ein Zo Agada nah-nah nah-nah nah-nah. Then the kids get bored and start changing the words. Eat Your Soup, Eat Your Soup, It's Good For You, Lotsa Veggies Too nah-nah nah-nah nah-nah.

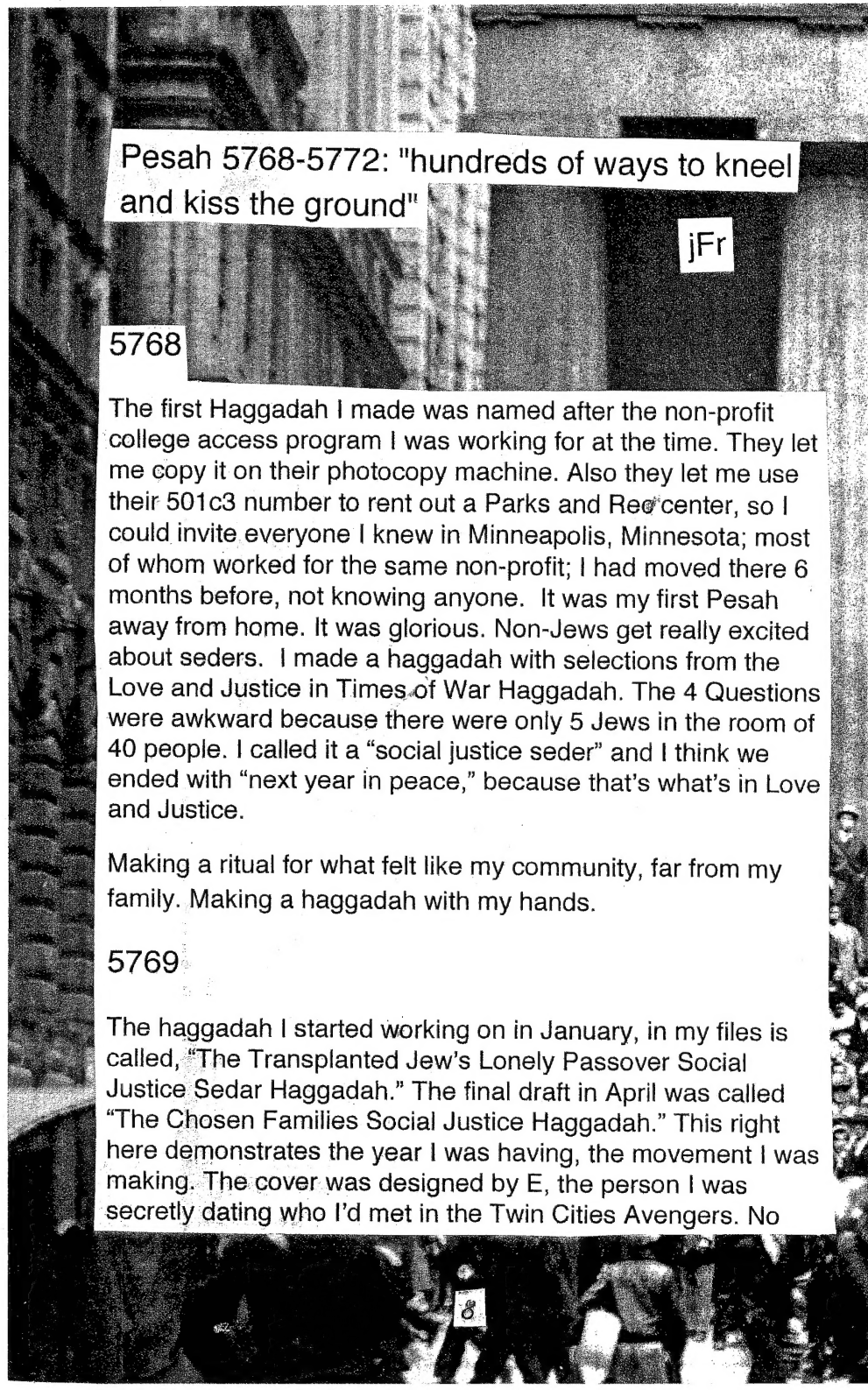
Oh god, soup. Matzah ball soup, Passover, gefilte fish, gross gefilte fish, the kind in jars packed in jelly, and who in their right mind would actually eat that shit voluntarily? You get that sleepy eyed, stomach pitching feeling and look towards the back of the bus. The bathroom door is hanging open and there's a dirty little toilet in there begging to be puked in. And

So fuck them, you don't need to go hiking, and what's so great about the house of the book anyway. There are horses in a corral to feed, a rope course to climb on, and some days Zack Horowitz doesn't take Sarah Friedman on hikes and you get to watch him play capture the flag. So it isn't so bad. But at night in your cold solitary sleeping bag you think about David, Alana, and the thick curly hair you never get to weave, the vague scent of mediterranean seawater on the pillow next to yours, and the heat that now radiated toward a fresh pair of wandering hands.

At lilah tov circle, David Rachlis borrows his older brother Seth's guitar and helps lead song session. They get to that stupid Peter Paul and Mary song and everyone sticks out their arms to soar around like jet planes during the chorus but you don't. You just stand there swaying a little, pretending Alana and her new best friend Leah Grossman are the twin towers and David's a show off hijacker and all three of them are going to explode.

At the end of the weekend the fantastically tall tour buses come to get everyone, kicking up dust and gravel from their axels. There are three of them and they park so close together that you have to carry your duffel bag on your head just to get through. You board bus #2 as quickly as possible, picking a front row seat because when you rode in just a few days before you got car sick and puked all over the back row and Jacob, the kid who sneaks in his yellow gameboy every time even though you can't have electronics on Shabbat, won't let you live it down.

And it's better to sit in front where you can watch the clumps of road kill slide under the bus instead of seeing it vanish, further-butchered behind you. What's the appeal of the backseat anyway? Every chair is made from the same carpet-like fabric,



Pesah 5768-5772: "hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground"

jFr

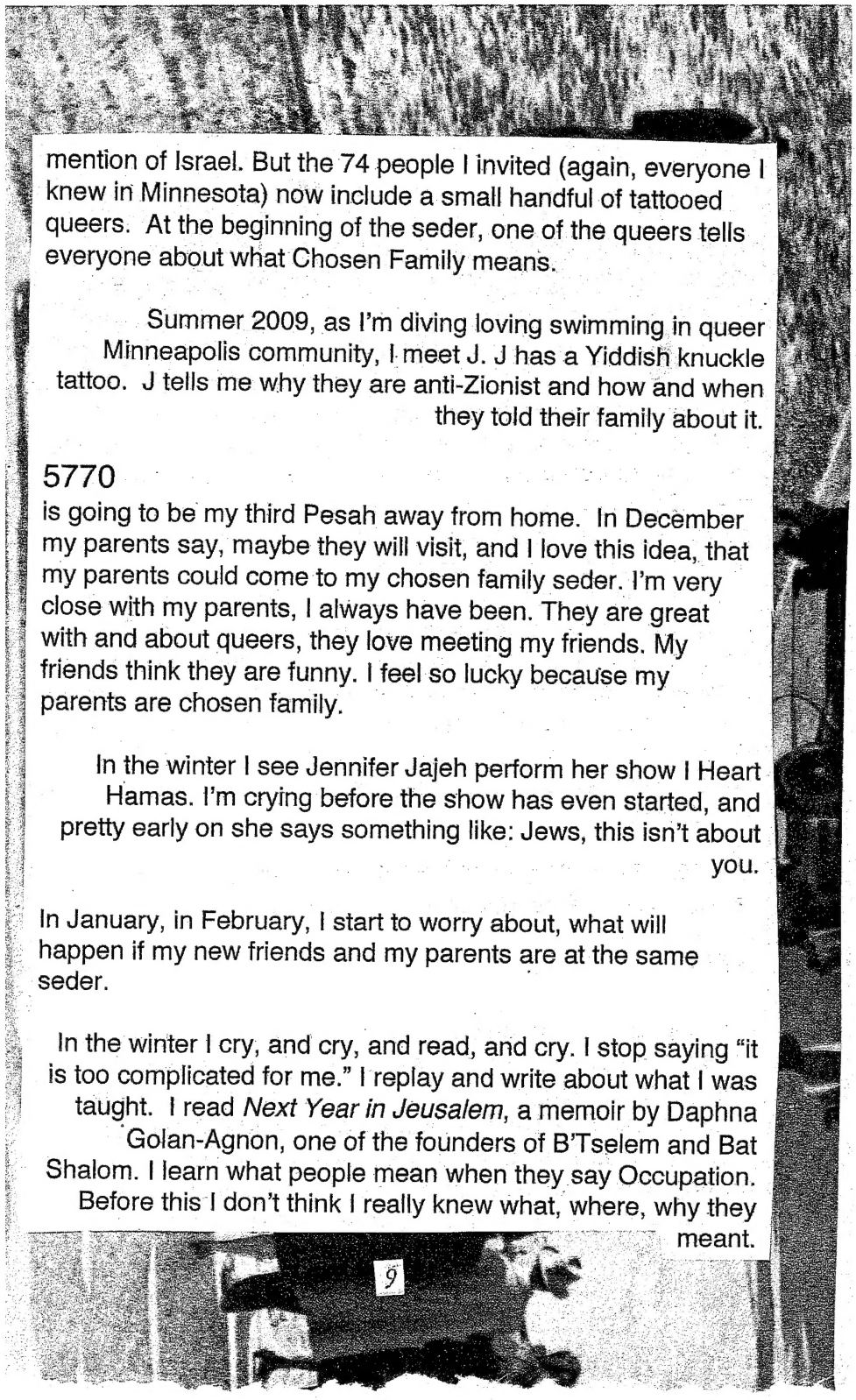
5768

The first Haggadah I made was named after the non-profit college access program I was working for at the time. They let me copy it on their photocopy machine. Also they let me use their 501c3 number to rent out a Parks and Rec center, so I could invite everyone I knew in Minneapolis, Minnesota; most of whom worked for the same non-profit; I had moved there 6 months before, not knowing anyone. It was my first Pesah away from home. It was glorious. Non-Jews get really excited about seders. I made a haggadah with selections from the Love and Justice in Times of War Haggadah. The 4 Questions were awkward because there were only 5 Jews in the room of 40 people. I called it a "social justice seder" and I think we ended with "next year in peace," because that's what's in Love and Justice.

Making a ritual for what felt like my community, far from my family. Making a haggadah with my hands.

5769

The haggadah I started working on in January, in my files is called, "The Transplanted Jew's Lonely Passover Social Justice Sedar Haggadah." The final draft in April was called "The Chosen Families Social Justice Haggadah." This right here demonstrates the year I was having, the movement I was making. The cover was designed by E, the person I was secretly dating who I'd met in the Twin Cities Avengers. No



mention of Israel. But the 74 people I invited (again, everyone I knew in Minnesota) now include a small handful of tattooed queers. At the beginning of the seder, one of the queers tells everyone about what Chosen Family means.

Summer 2009, as I'm diving loving swimming in queer Minneapolis community, I meet J. J has a Yiddish knuckle tattoo. J tells me why they are anti-Zionist and how and when they told their family about it.

5770

is going to be my third Pesah away from home. In December my parents say, maybe they will visit, and I love this idea, that my parents could come to my chosen family seder. I'm very close with my parents, I always have been. They are great with and about queers, they love meeting my friends. My friends think they are funny. I feel so lucky because my parents are chosen family.

In the winter I see Jennifer Jajeh perform her show I Heart Hamas. I'm crying before the show has even started, and pretty early on she says something like: Jews, this isn't about you.

In January, in February, I start to worry about, what will happen if my new friends and my parents are at the same seder.

In the winter I cry, and cry, and read, and cry. I stop saying "it is too complicated for me." I replay and write about what I was taught. I read *Next Year in Jeusalem*, a memoir by Daphna Golan-Agnon, one of the founders of B'Tselem and Bat Shalom. I learn what people mean when they say Occupation. Before this I don't think I really knew what, where, why they meant.

this circle of requests so that when they arrange the girls all of you end up in the same room. Last year Sarah Friedman didn't make it in and spent the first night pretending to cry so loudly that her counselor Rebecca, the only counselor with a tattoo, walked her over to your cabin and asked your counselor, Naomi, if Sarah could sleep in the extra bunk. And of course Naomi said yes because she's awesome. She taught you all this trick to use on Zack Horowitz, showed you how to drop a pen just a couple feet away and wait for the boy to pick it up. You haven't used it yet but Alana Silverberg did and you nearly died giggling when Zack went to grab it. And just as he was reaching for the thing Alana realized she had thrown a tampon instead of a bic pen and then you both ran away screaming and hid behind the mess hall until dinner.

It goes on like that for a while but then towards the end of the year you find Alana paying less attention to you and the uni-bed/uber-sleeping-bag-quilt and more attention to her hikes with David Rachlis. You ask her where she's going. She whispers "the house of the book" and you remember the first time you came to Camp Alonim.

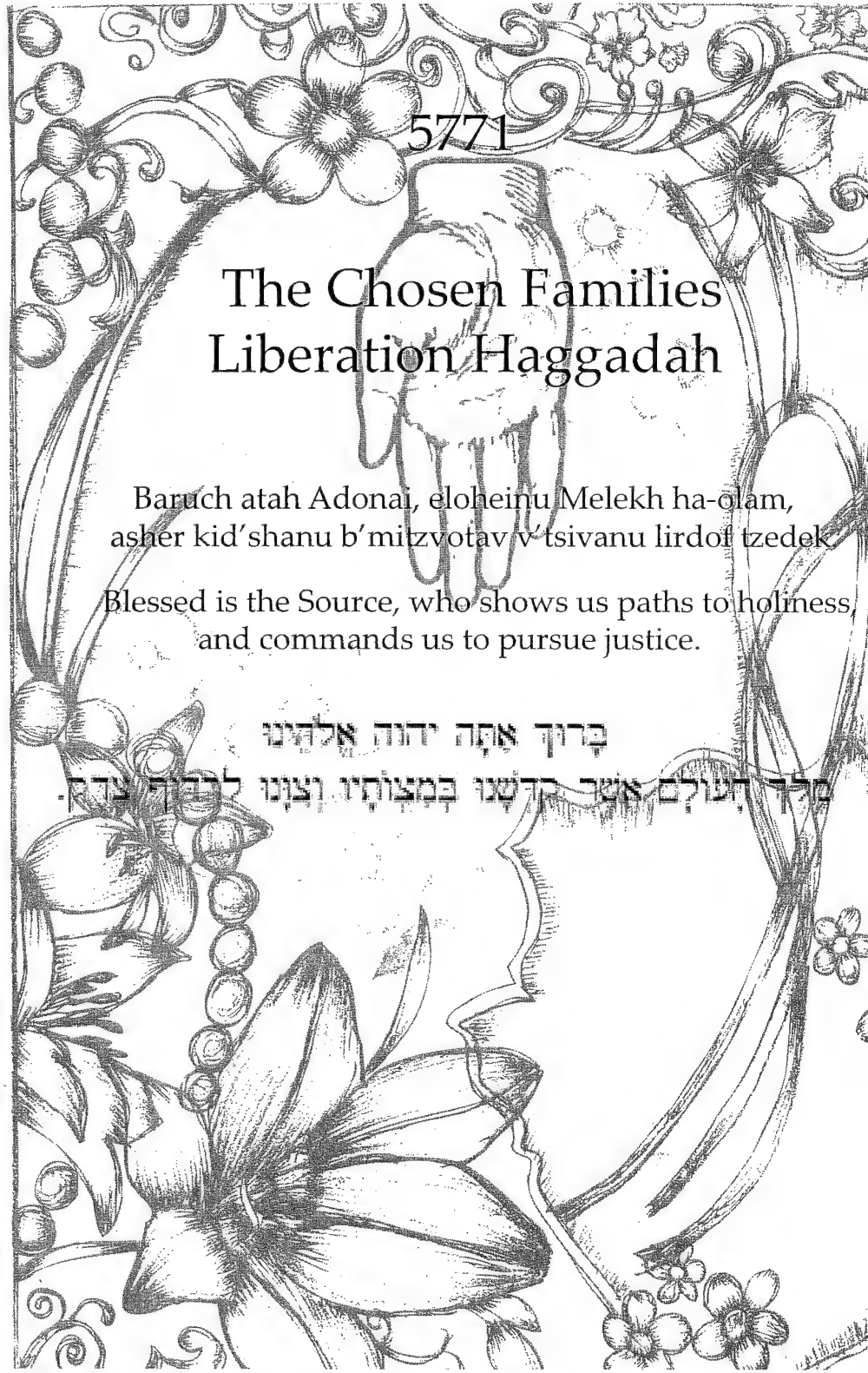
The counselors took all the kids on this deathly long hike into the hills, up up and up until you reached the house of the book, and it really does look like the Power Rangers' headquarters. You wondered if the counselors were lying about it being filmed there but you were twelve so what did you know and it didn't matter anyway because nobody in your grade would even dare admit to still watching that show. Then the other girls are taking long hikes during free play too and no one invites you anywhere anymore and you wonder if it's the small constellation of zits that's forming on your neck or if there's something going on up there that's more interesting than you are.

Im Tirtzu, It is No Dream
By Jules Shendelman

You are terrible at volleyball. Despite the fact that you have played it every year of elementary PE, you have never quite managed to pick up the rules and it's obvious. Even if you did understand the game, the fact is you're not enthusiastic enough to dive into the sand like the other girls, all golden and ponytailed. They exist solely to leap towards balls with Amazonian thighs and white canvas sneakers. You live for Saturday school because that is the one day a week you get to spend staring at Zack Horowitz, that gorgeous motherfucker. Everyone loves Zack Horowitz.

At Hebrew school the girls look more like you than the graceful aryan girls at Sierra Vista Middle School. The jewish girls are about six inches shorter and brunettes and for a long time they were your best friends. They don't play volleyball but they do the one team activity you really like. At the monthly Shabbaton sleepovers, the brunettes push the bunk beds together to create a massive uni-bed. When you were younger you had a book about medieval households and there was a picture of a whole family in one big bed, dogs and all, huddled for warmth, smiles on everyone's serene white face. Everyone at camp sleeps like that, right on top of each other and you fucking love that. Sleeping under the zipped together sleeping bag quilt, you can feel Alana Silverberg's heartbeat and you really would die to braid her thick curly hair. It's so gorgeous and she uses conditioner with real dead sea salt that her mom brought back from Aliyah.

Fuck volleyball. At Shabbaton everyone plays soccer. "Everyone" means all the boys and a couple girls, nobody from your cabin. You all have rigged it so that when you fill out your paperwork you request one other girl in the cabin and it's like


5771
The Chosen Families
Liberation Haggadah
Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu Melekh ha-olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu lirdof tzedek.
Blessed is the Source, who shows us paths to holiness,
and commands us to pursue justice.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לִרְדֹּף צֶדֶק.

In March, I go East for my brother's wedding. I haven't seen him since he got out of jail. But it is the only time I'm going to see my parents in person before the come for seder. E and I fly into Philadelphia and drive to Massachusetts with my parents. My mom and I go out for brunch by ourselves the morning of the wedding, and I say, I think I have to talk to you about Israel. We strategize, because my dad does not do well with surprises. Or disagreements. She gives him a heads up. The day after the wedding we have a 5 hour drive back to Philadelphia. I spend the drive gripping white knuckles onto E's hand, sick to my stomach. As we're about to cross into Pennsylvania, I say something like, "So I think I need to talk to you about Israel."

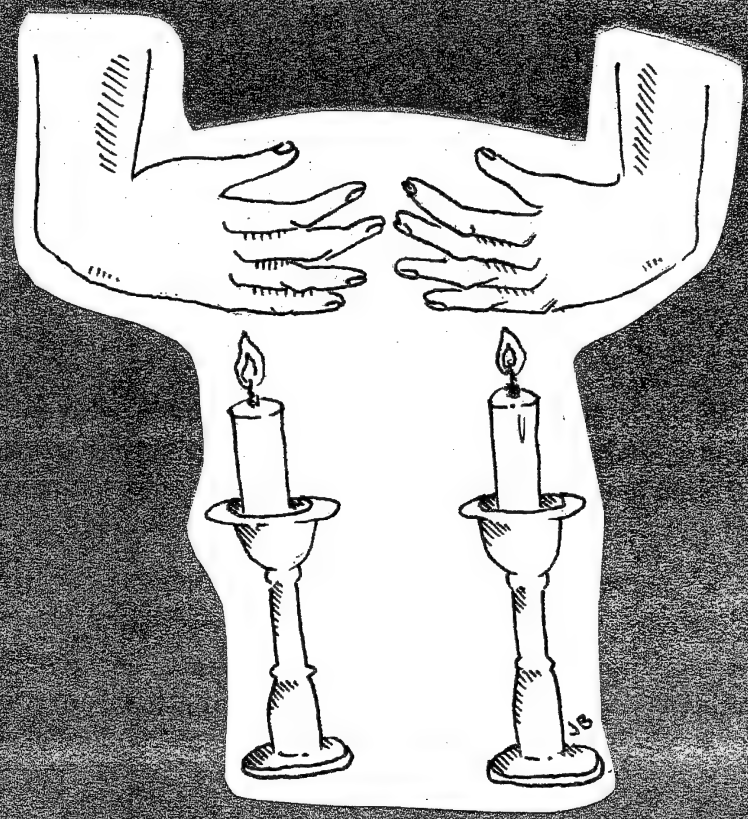
It doesn't go well. My dad says Islamaphobic things to a degree I wasn't expecting, none of that I was expecting at all, really. I have no idea what I said. But everyone loves each other, we're okay, we're okay.

I lose a lot of sleep putting this haggadah together. Again it is called the Chosen Families Social Justice Haggadah. E makes the cover with blooming swirling flowers. I stay up late, crying, fighting with Microsoft publisher, fighting with myself over every word. I picture the table, and somehow I see in my head J sitting there next to my dad, and I picture both of them disgusted with me: how could I think these things? How could I say these things? How could I include this and fail to mention that? Everyone is unhappy.

I end up writing, and I include in the very middle of the haggadah, between the maggid, the story of the Exodus, and the singing of Dayenu, this page. When we get there in the seder I say something like "oh I wrote this thing about the seder and haggadah making some thoughts read them later never mind whatever let's SING!"

I was spiritually whole. I wonder how much disappointment and frustration Vera and Oola will deny themselves this month. I imagine that they are deeply unhappy in themselves, but they find tremendous comfort in their togetherness. I would be content with that kind of life. I want to crawl into their fleecy warm unhappiness and live there until my future comes. I want to feel rooted, even just for a second, in some misery older, more settled than my own.

The snow stops, and the other guests start to complain about digging their cars out. Before I leave, Vera writes her cell number on the back of my hand, I'm not sure what for.

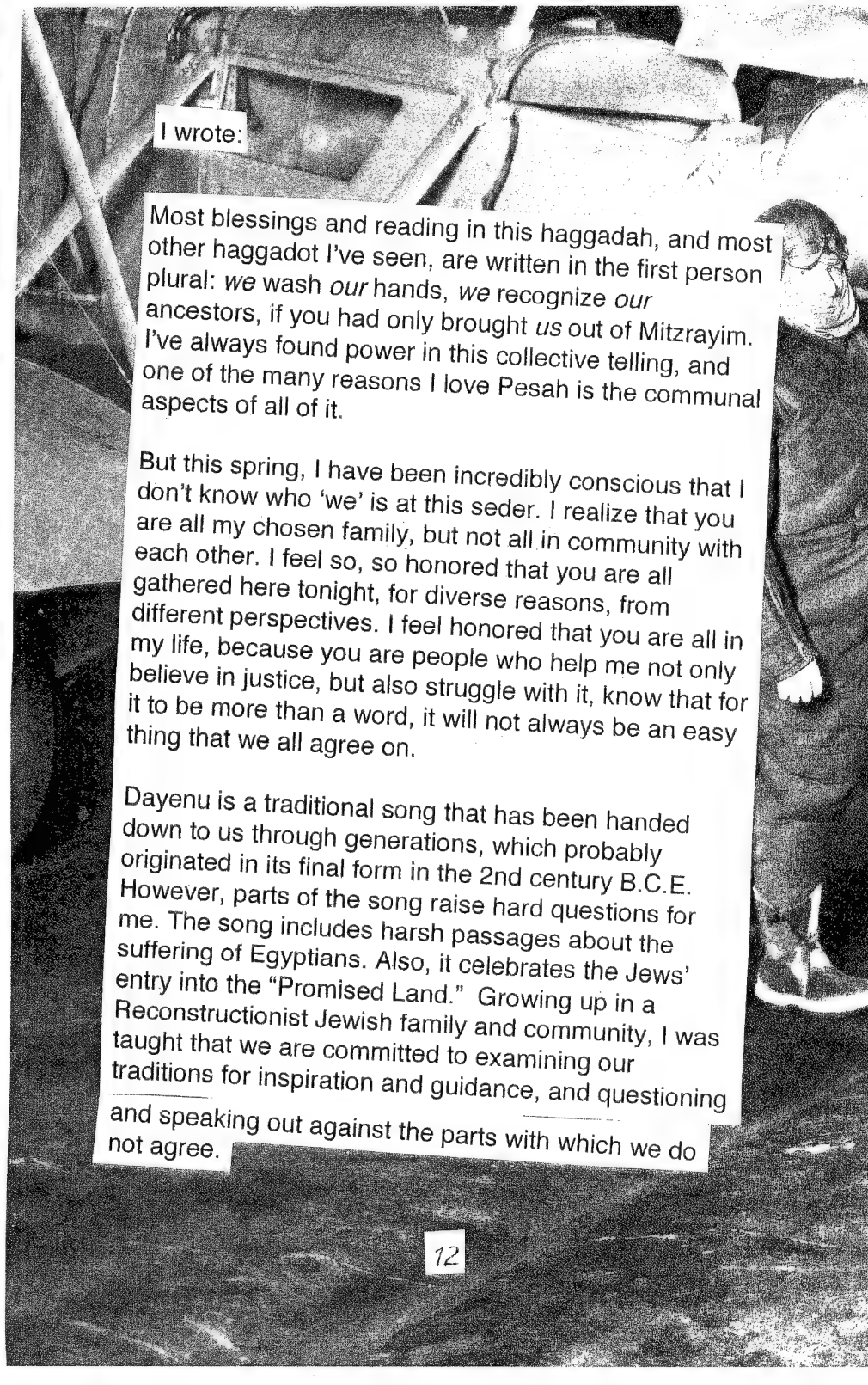


nursing home, and he really didn't want to go, but his family wouldn't listen to him. They wanted him put away. The day he was to be moved in I asked him how he felt. He said, "Screw it. I've got no choice but to be happy." I don't feel particularly inspired by this story. In fact, the whole discussion makes me rather sad. I wonder if simultaneously, at every Shabbat in the entire world, people are meditating on this same idea. Is this what being an adult is? Is this what it means to be settled? - refusing to acknowledge feelings of frustration, anger, and disappointment? I hope not.

The service moves on. We light candles, sing a few more songs, welcome the Shabbat bride, eat some challah, drink some wine. Then its potluck and mingle time. I brought some rice and beans, the same thing I'd cook any other night, except this time with nutritional yeast, for the special occasion. The other dishes are more elaborate than mine, but then again, grownups cooked them.

Everyone seems to want to talk to me. I find out that even though Vera and Oola's Shabbat is always advertised in the listserv, I'm actually the first stranger to come ever. Vera and Oola corner me by a mini-statue of a woman weeping. "We've been together 9 years." Says Vera, her eyebrows raised, waiting for my reaction. "Aha." I say.

The story of the older dyke is mysteriously absent from the internet, or at least I haven't been able to find it. I want to know Vera and Oola's lives, how they got here. Vera tells me she's American. She applied for Canadian citizenship in 1995, the year of the referendum for Quebec's sovereignty from Canada. Because the federal government knew that new citizens would vote against separation, they pushed Quebec applicants through as quickly as possible. "I was swearing my allegiance to the Queen in a matter of weeks!" she explained, standing a little too close to me. "Lucky, eh?" I saw younger Vera raising her hand to the oath, the same year that in a Connecticut hospital, my tiny arms held my new baby brother. I didn't even know I was gay then. I didn't even know what the internet was.



I wrote:

Most blessings and reading in this haggadah, and most other haggadot I've seen, are written in the first person plural: *we* wash *our* hands, *we* recognize *our* ancestors, if you had only brought *us* out of Mitzrayim. I've always found power in this collective telling, and one of the many reasons I love Pesah is the communal aspects of all of it.

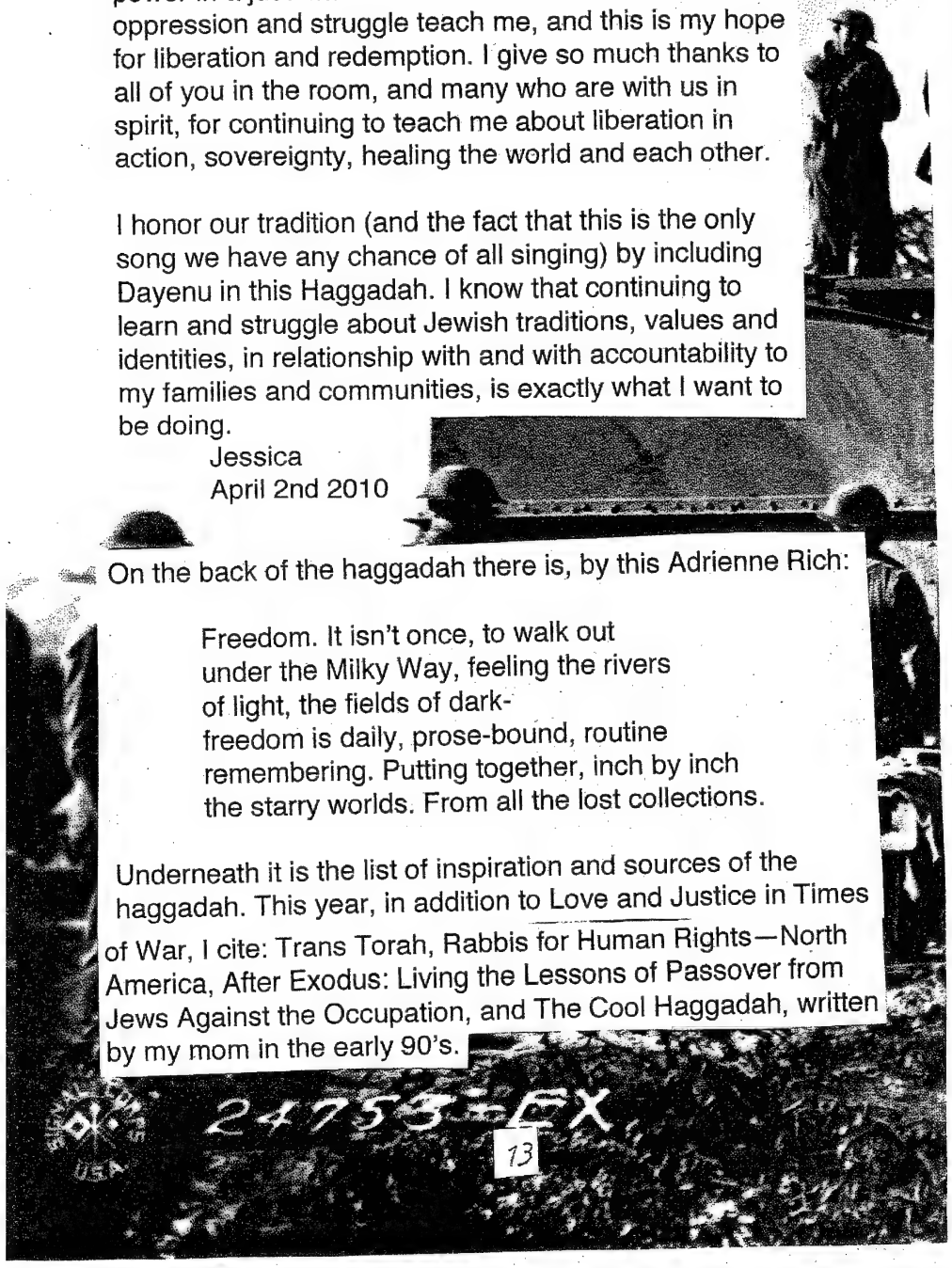
But this spring, I have been incredibly conscious that I don't know who 'we' is at this seder. I realize that you are all my chosen family, but not all in community with each other. I feel so, so honored that you are all gathered here tonight, for diverse reasons, from different perspectives. I feel honored that you are all in my life, because you are people who help me not only believe in justice, but also struggle with it, know that for it to be more than a word, it will not always be an easy thing that we all agree on.

Dayenu is a traditional song that has been handed down to us through generations, which probably originated in its final form in the 2nd century B.C.E. However, parts of the song raise hard questions for me. The song includes harsh passages about the suffering of Egyptians. Also, it celebrates the Jews' entry into the "Promised Land." Growing up in a Reconstructionist Jewish family and community, I was taught that we are committed to examining our traditions for inspiration and guidance, and questioning and speaking out against the parts with which we do not agree.

I believe that no matter how great the oppression we suffer, it does not justify a land exclusively for Jews. We must engage in the hard work of sharing land and power in a just manner. This is what our histories of oppression and struggle teach me, and this is my hope for liberation and redemption. I give so much thanks to all of you in the room, and many who are with us in spirit, for continuing to teach me about liberation in action, sovereignty, healing the world and each other.

I honor our tradition (and the fact that this is the only song we have any chance of all singing) by including Dayenu in this Haggadah. I know that continuing to learn and struggle about Jewish traditions, values and identities, in relationship with and with accountability to my families and communities, is exactly what I want to be doing.

Jessica
April 2nd 2010



On the back of the haggadah there is, by this Adrienne Rich:

> Freedom. It isn't once, to walk out
> under the Milky Way, feeling the rivers
> of light, the fields of dark-
> freedom is daily, prose-bound, routine
> remembering. Putting together, inch by inch
> the starry worlds. From all the lost collections.

Underneath it is the list of inspiration and sources of the haggadah. This year, in addition to Love and Justice in Times of War, I cite: Trans Torah, Rabbis for Human Rights—North America, After Exodus: Living the Lessons of Passover from Jews Against the Occupation, and The Cool Haggadah, written by my mom in the early 90's.

Vera is a handsome lady. Her flat mouth and deep, discerning eyes don't quite match her bright, unassuming voice. Her dark gray hair is cropped close to her head except for a budding rat-tail to one side.

The room is half full with other people who are not at all my age. A few women sample pistachios and olives around a tiny coffee table. They're putting the shells and olive pits right back into the bowl. A couple fret in the kitchen, the filo's burning. A man sitting straight up on the couch appears to be sleeping. Perhaps coming here was a mistake.

One of the kitchen women moves towards the door. "I'm Oola," she says, holding Vera's hand against her waist. "Hi, I'm Zoe," I say. Another extended silence. This will all be over soon.

I excuse myself to the washroom, which is conspicuously located next to the couch. Can everyone hear me pee? Can everyone hear me wanting to leave? I'm wiping the snow off of my face when Oola knocks on the door. "Just to let you know, we're starting soon."

I take my place with the other guests, facing the window, looking onto the calming storm. Oola sits facing us with her legs crossed on the floor. She begins to hum a slow low melody. Oola's face is Mick Jagger. She has a lot of hair, the kind you can see through the strands, like a rug made of dust. Her humming turns into yai dai dai and everyone joins in.

Oola opens her mouth wide for every word she speaks, and smiles in the pauses. "Tonight is the first day of the month of Adar, she says. "In Adar we are instructed to increase our joy incrementally, a little more every day." How unrealistic, I think. "How unrealistic," says Oola. "But during Adar we can think about joy as something to cultivate, in other words, this idea that we can choose to be happy." I think I can generally get on board with this idea. Then we discuss. The sleeping man perks up to tell a story. "This guy I know was getting put into a

Shabbat with Vera
Zoe Page

It's snowing hard. The storm gives this night a sort of spiritual weight, which is pretty uncommon in my life these days. I've been spending too much time on the internet, scrolling databases, looking for something that calls to me, an all-inclusive life-package. I don't like this feeling of uncertainty. I'm looking for some cliché answers. I wish I could just live my life like right now matters. Somehow the present feels so inauthentic. But this snow is helping.

I'm a few houses away when a head pokes out from an open door and calls to me "Hello, Come in." The head stays and stares while I trudge the last few meters. The sun is all the way down, past time to light the Shabbat candles. Not like I'm the Shabbat police or anything, far from it. I recently signed up for a Montreal Jewish listserv, out of curiosity. I thought it might be a step towards repairing my connection to Judaism. The last Shabbat dinner I attended was when I was seven, around this same time of year, at a Rabbi's house because I thought I'd start going to Hebrew school, mostly because my friends were doing it. The rabbi told me to dress up, so I went as the wicked-witch-of-the-west, my Halloween costume. Everyone else was dressed up as Esther, Haman, and Mordechai, the heroes and villains of the story of Purim. I was mortified, and never came back. Unfortunately, this listserv mostly consists of announcements for Klezmer concerts, Jew-led Yoga retreats, and a dubious weekly column about Israel. But when I saw an invitation to a "warm and welcoming" Shabbat dinner at Vera Golberg's house, I thought I'd give it a try. I step into the house.

The last thing I see before my glasses fog up is a big pair of arms floating towards me. I feel myself surrounded by pilly fleece and the smell of filo pastry. "I'm Vera. So glad to meet you." The hug is not short. When she pulls away she is soaked in snow.

The seder went... oh, beautifully. Afterwards my dad mails me Alan Dershowitz's book *The Case for Israel*, with a letter tucked inside responding to my haggadah explanation, which at least he properly recognized as a letter to him, even before I did. I tell him I'll read it. Two years later: I've started the introduction 5 times. It is hard to read the table of contents.

In the early summer I go to the 2010 Assembly of Jews Confronting Racism and Israeli Apartheid. When I call home from Detroit my dad hangs up and my mom asks "so is every workshop anti-semetic?"
Back in Minneapolis I start going to meetings.

5771

I work on a Tu B'shvat haggadah, full of poems, stories, and information about the Stop the JNF Campaign. I work on a Pesah haggadah for IJAN. And I work on my own. I realize, I have to make my own; it is how I know where I am in the spring. I decide to do it by hand. Last year's battles with Microsoft Publisher be damned, I'm going to make a zine! I tell my parents, "I'm going to make it by hand! I'm going to use last year's haggadah and some others and cut it up and tape it together and then photocopy it! *It is called a zine*!!" My mom says, "That's great, honey, that's what we did before computers." Oh, right.

This one is called The Chosen Families Liberation Haggadah. It turns out that I can have just as epic a battle with a photocopy machine as I had with Publisher. But the finished haggadah is full of poems and handwriting and bodies and we talk about healing and we talk about olive trees and the Wall and we talk about indigenous sovereignty. People bring poems and stories and prayers for liberation from all of the many traditions and histories in the room. There are more Jews than ever before. There is more singing than ever before. I feel so full, I feel so, so proud.

These are the days when I've stopped telling my parents very many details about where I'm going, what I'm doing. They know I host a seder, they don't offer to come and I don't invite them. They don't ask to see the haggadah and I don't offer.

Back in June of 5770, I met a sweet someone in Detroit, he co-lead a workshop on "Jewish Anti-Zionist Spiritual Reclamation and Political Organizing." He lives in Connecticut. But this spring, we start talking on the phone once a week, every other day, every day...This Pesah, he sends me queer readings to include in the haggadah. We send each other pictures of our seder tables. We say, maybe next year, or the year after... some year, together.

The information packet that I requested from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College arrives on the first day of Pesah.

5772

I've moved to New York in January to go to yeshiva and apply to rabbinical school and to have a shorter commute to dates in Connecticut. I plan a spring break trip to Minneapolis, so that I'll have the first seder at home with my family and the second seder in Minneapolis with political family.

My family has been using the same haggadah since the early 90's, created for our reading level when my cousins and I were in elementary school. People don't really like it, but they do it because it is what we do. My mom deeply loves doing this, but sometimes my uncles make fun of her, and her sister stopped coming after both of their parents passed away. I offer to make a new haggadah for this year.

There is only one reference to capitalism in the haggadah, which I get teased about but smiling, by aunts and uncles who are awkward but pleased and interested. They really like the change from the 4 children to the 4 people (angry, ashamed, fearful, compassionate). I include lots of things about teachers, my family is full of public school teachers. There is no reference to Israel until the very end. My dad request that it says both

Jew I inhabit this unique position and experience some kind of critically rich alienation from the discourses of Zionism, which deeply informs my radical solidarity politics or whatever. But I'm not sure if that's true. Just like being trans doesn't inherently make me more feminist than cis dudes and being Jewish definitely doesn't make me smarter or more sensitive or more "progressive" than other white people. OVER IT.

If for some reason you ever need proof of gay Jewish assholes existing, look up Michael Lucas and read his 5,000 word bio on his website next to a giant picture of himself brooding. He directed the big-budget Zionist gay porn *Men of Israel,* shot with a full cast of muscle Jews in all outdoor locations around Israel with the stated intention of encouraging gay tourism to Israel. He weirdly has a lot of mainstream gay political clout and was responsible for getting the anti-Zionist group Siege Busters banned from having an event at the LGBT community center in New York (by organizing major donors to threaten to withdraw support).

"He had a very difficult time growing up gay and Jewish in homophobic and anti-Semitic Communist Russia," he says of himself in said 5,000 word website bio. "He always felt different from the norm and knew that those around him also saw him as different. He was very rebellious and was not afraid to speak his mind, getting into a lot of trouble for his independent thinking." It's funny to see how these identities and subsequent alienation can just as easily be narrated as the basis for neoconservative Zionist politics and a capitalist success story as they can be told as being inherently "radical."

So it feels better to stick with the obvious these days, avoid weird generalizations. I'm Jewish because my mom is Jewish. I'm trans because who knows. I'm queer because I'm seriously a little bit into those gymnastics outfits. I oppose Zionism because it's fucking gnarly colonial state violence.

interested in learning more about this read Muscular Judaism by Todd Presner).

I got into this not only because the pictures of the gymnastics clubs are pretty great and hella gay (also think there's maybe a super interesting parallel between Jewish gymnastics clubs and the rise of gay male gym culture...), but because learning this history reassured me, serving as a reminder that ideals of maleness and masculinity are culturally/historically/politically bound. Being able to see myself reflected in a long tradition of sensitive Jewish nerds made being a dude seem a lot less intimidating. And maybe my consistent failure to do pushups for more than two days in a row or "get" why people go to the gym is totally just a subconscious rejection of fucked up Zionist body politics! Right?

At the same time I am so wary of invoking "tradition" or romanticizing some made-up concept of a static past, like putting forth an oversimplified narrative where Jewish dudes were just like sensitively frolicking around and then Zionism happened and imposed a bizarro colonial hypermasculinity so we should strive to return to this pre-Zionist state of being. Even when they embrace a heartfelt, bookish version of maleness, it's not like "traditional" Jewish attitudes around gender haven't been totally misogynist and fucked up (just like many "sensitive dudes" themselves). And even if I didn't have a cultural history of some kinda "alternative" masculinity to look to, it's not like I couldn't figure it out myself or seek out other models within subcultures or whatever. ~I CHOSE THIS LYFESTYLE~

And I'm saying all this because in trying to write about some kind of relationship between queerness and Jewishness and anti-Zionism, I start to wonder if one actually exists at all. The formulaic thing to say, right, would be that as a trans/queer

L'shanah ha-ba'ah b'olam b'shalom and *L'shana haba-a bi Y'rushalayim.*

This is how we are learning to live and make ritual together. There is something revolutionary, I know it, about making this with my family, with my father, with my mother.

I was accepted to rabbinical school a week for Pesah. I'm telling people I don't know if I'll go next year, maybe wait a year. My dad is telling the family that over the next 6 years they should be prepared for our family seders to expand from 40 minutes to 4 hours.

The day after the family seder I fly to Minneapolis for seder at J's house. I take many deep breaths. We are making Jewish ritual that works to expose and oppose oppression. We name the land we're on, the Indigenous peoples of the land we're on. We look at the many small stories in our lives and see and name systems of nationalism and imperialism and capitalism. We look at large systems and we name how they are showing up in our lives, in our friends and families and comrades lives. We remember where we've been in the past year, and we think about where we want to go. And we look to and feel and feed our bodies. We feed ourselves with food and drink and stories and poems.

Some of the poems that I put in my family haggadah are also in J's radical anti-Zionist haggadah. Reading these, finding words that resonate true and powerful in both places, for fighting and for healing in every place, my heart leaps. We read together:

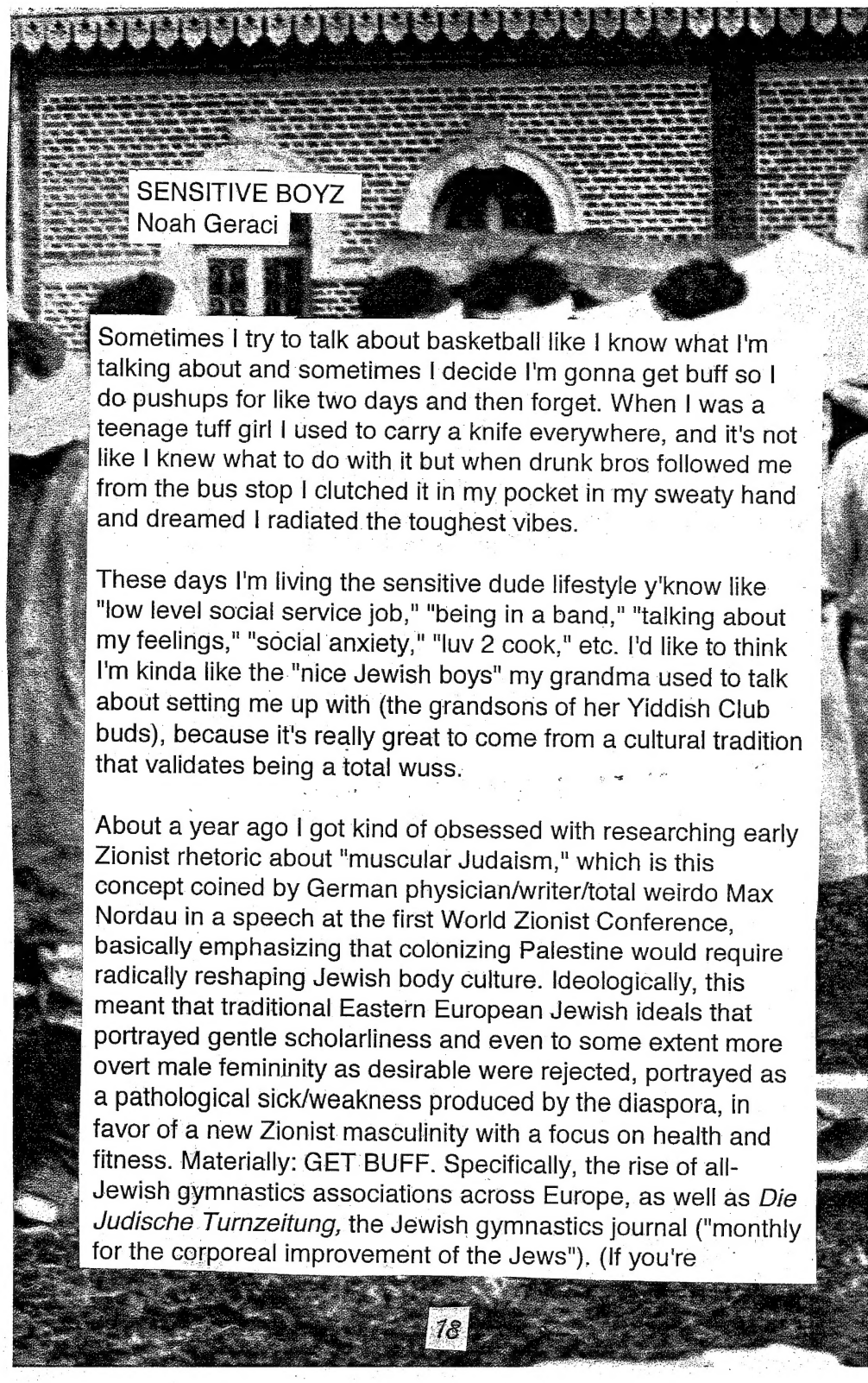
Today, like every other day,
we wake up empty and frightened.
Don't open the door to the study and begin reading.
Take down a musical instrument.
Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

-Rumi

23rd of אפריל, 5771

Saturday, April 23rd, 2011

Minneapolis, MN



SENSITIVE BOYZ

Noah Geraci

Sometimes I try to talk about basketball like I know what I'm talking about and sometimes I decide I'm gonna get buff so I do pushups for like two days and then forget. When I was a teenage tuff girl I used to carry a knife everywhere, and it's not like I knew what to do with it but when drunk bros followed me from the bus stop I clutched it in my pocket in my sweaty hand and dreamed I radiated the toughest vibes.

These days I'm living the sensitive dude lifestyle y'know like "low level social service job," "being in a band," "talking about my feelings," "social anxiety," "luv 2 cook," etc. I'd like to think I'm kinda like the "nice Jewish boys" my grandma used to talk about setting me up with (the grandsons of her Yiddish Club buds), because it's really great to come from a cultural tradition that validates being a total wuss.

About a year ago I got kind of obsessed with researching early Zionist rhetoric about "muscular Judaism," which is this concept coined by German physician/writer/total weirdo Max Nordau in a speech at the first World Zionist Conference, basically emphasizing that colonizing Palestine would require radically reshaping Jewish body culture. Ideologically, this meant that traditional Eastern European Jewish ideals that portrayed gentle scholarliness and even to some extent more overt male femininity as desirable were rejected, portrayed as a pathological sick/weakness produced by the diaspora, in favor of a new Zionist masculinity with a focus on health and fitness. Materially: GET BUFF. Specifically, the rise of all-Jewish gymnastics associations across Europe, as well as *Die Judische Turnzeitung,* the Jewish gymnastics journal ("monthly for the corporeal improvement of the Jews"). (If you're